

Research Abstract – Hope V. Dornfeld

Title: Songs of Sorrow, Hope, and Praise: Toward a Historical Analysis of Negro Spirituals

Program of Study – Vocal Music

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: 3MT: Three Minute Thesis

Mentor(s) and Mentor Email – Dr. Patricia Campbell (pcampbell@liberty.edu)

Student name(s) and email(s) – Hope Dornfeld (hvdornfeld@liberty.edu)

Abstract example: Traditional Negro spirituals play a key role in America’s music history. Spirituals were initially perpetuated by enslaved Africans in the American South through the oral tradition but today are available in a wide variety of choral, vocal, and instrumental arrangements. This presentation will briefly analyze the following traditional spirituals of varying themes: “Steal Away,” “Hold On,” “Sweet Little Jesus Boy,” “Ride on, King Jesus,” “Witness,” “Deep River” and “Balm in Gilead.” Spirituals can be divided into three distinct textual categories which correspond with their original use and historical context. Songs of sorrow are those songs which relate images or stories of despair or dejection, derived from their initial use as laments or work songs. Songs of hope inspire the singer to look toward his or her heavenly destination. These songs often contained symbolic messages used to guide the enslaved Africans to freedom through the Underground Railroad. Finally, songs of praise contain texts that bring glory to God, either by telling stories found in Scripture or by inviting others to have a relationship with Jesus. This presentation will address issues of historical context, textual themes, and performance practice inherent in an analysis of Negro spirituals. Primary sources, such as *Slave Songs of The United States* will be utilized in addition to prominent secondary sources, such as André Thomas’ book *Way Over in Beulah Lan’*: *Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*.

Christian worldview integration: My worldview as a Christian musician and scholar has impacted my research design and communications process in several ways. First, my belief in a God who is the Ultimate Truth encourages me to conduct my research in a way that accurately represents my subject. As a follower of Christ, I am called to pursue truth, both in my personal walk with the Lord and in academics. This understanding leads me to read my historical sources with an eye toward God's redemptive purpose for humanity. As I gather information from my sources and seek to discern the cultural and textual implications of Negro spirituals, my job is to provide a true representation of facts in a way that will honor the Lord. My research subject itself is largely rooted in my Christian worldview. I am eagerly anticipating the joy of heaven, and this project provides a way of demonstrating that hope to my culture through historical-textual analysis followed by oral presentation. The entirety of my research process has been guided by my worldview. Since this is a qualitative project, I believe that using the lens of Biblical worldview will prove especially impactful. In today's culture, many qualitative studies are undertaken using a secular or post-Christian worldview. As I engage in the research process, it is my goal to view the results as an offering of praise to Christ. As a Christian, I am called to present my research subject in a respectful manner that will encourage my audience to appreciate this unique genre of sacred music.